



2019–2020 NTSB

# MOST WANTED LIST OF TRANSPORTATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS



## Eliminate Distractions

### What is the problem?

Too many drivers are operating their vehicles while distracted, leading to deadly crashes. Driver distraction occurs when drivers divert their attention away from the driving task and fail to do the basics, like continuously monitoring the road and controlling their vehicle to address unexpected events. Personal electronic devices (PEDs), such as cell phones, are one of the greatest contributors to driver distraction.

In 2016, more than 3,100 fatal crashes involving distraction occurred on US roadways (9% of all fatal crashes that year). These crashes involved 3,210 distracted drivers, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), because some of them involved more than one distracted driver.

Contributing to the problem is the widespread belief by many drivers that they can multitask and still operate a vehicle safely. But multitasking is a myth; humans can only focus cognitive attention on one task at a time. That's why executing any task other than driving is dangerous and risks a crash.

Although drivers contend with many other distractions, such as other passengers and infotainment systems, PEDs are particularly concerning because drivers spend more time on these devices than on other distracting activities. We continue to investigate crashes in all modes that involve the inappropriate use of PEDs.

But manual distraction—texting—is not the only concern; “cognitive” distractions can occur when using hands-free devices because, although you're not physically holding something or pushing a button, you are still focusing your mind elsewhere, such as on your conversation, rather than on the road ahead. We have seen several crashes involving hands-free devices and this form of cognitive distraction.

**3,450**  
Lives lost from  
distracted driving in  
2016 (9% of overall  
highway fatalities  
that year)  
Source: NHTSA

The risk of a crash  
increases  
**23x**  
when texting in a  
commercial vehicle  
Source: Virginia Tech  
Transportation Institute



On May 23, 2013, a truck-tractor in combination with a flatbed semitrailer hauling an oversize load struck the I-5 bridge above the Skagit River, resulting in a partial bridge collapse. Eight vehicle occupants were involved; three received minor injuries. We determined that the certified pilot/escort vehicle driver failed to perform required duties and to communicate potential hazards, due in part to distraction caused by cell phone use.

**2x**  
Odds of a crash when  
drivers engaged in  
all forms of visual-  
manual cell phone  
tasks, compared with  
the same drivers  
under similar traffic  
and environmental  
conditions without  
engaging in any visible  
nondriving tasks  
Source: AAA Foundation  
for Traffic Safety

### Related reports:

**HAR-14/01:** Collapse of the Interstate 5 Skagit River Bridge Following a Strike by an Oversize Combination Vehicle; Mt. Vernon, Washington; May 23, 2013; Accident ID HWY13MH012

**HAR-14/02:** Highway-Railroad Grade Crossing Collision; Rosedale, Maryland; May 28, 2013; Accident ID HWY13MH013

For detailed investigation reports, visit [www.nts.gov](http://www.nts.gov)

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## What can be done?

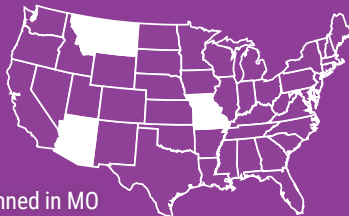
To reduce crashes, injuries, and deaths, drivers must keep their minds, hands, and eyes focused only on driving. Focusing on or thinking about anything other than the task at hand impairs performance and can lead to tragic consequences. Distraction can best be addressed through a combination of education, legislation, and enforcement.

**To address the problem of distraction, the following actions should be taken:**

### States

- › Ban all PED use on our roadways. The District of Columbia and 37 states restrict the use of cell phones by novice drivers, and 47 states, DC, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the US Virgin Islands ban text messaging for all drivers.
- › Strictly enforce laws; consider roadway monitoring to detain violators.

**States without  
a texting ban:  
Arizona, Montana  
and Missouri\***



\*Only drivers under age 21 are banned in MO

### Operators/Industry/Advocacy Groups

- › Educate the public. Public education continues to be important for teaching drivers, operators, and safety-critical personnel about the dangers of distractions. Legislation and enforcement can help bring about this change.



On May 28, 2013, a truck (inset), did not stop at a grade crossing and was struck by a freight train in Rosedale, Maryland, causing the cars carrying hazardous materials to derail. Five people were injured. Contributing to the crash was the truck driver's distraction due to a hands-free cell phone conversation.

### Vehicle Manufacturers

- › When designing and incorporating infotainment systems, consider the level of distraction they will create for drivers and restrict access when the vehicle is in motion.

### Public (Drivers)

- › Recognize that safe driving requires 100% of a driver's attention 100% of the time. Distraction is not only about holding a device in your hand or glancing away from the road; it also involves mentally straying from the driving task. You can't multitask!

**MWL**  
MOST WANTED LIST

**Critical changes needed  
to reduce transportation  
accidents, injuries, and  
fatalities**

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Safety Board

The NTSB **MOST WANTED LIST** highlights safety issues identified from the NTSB's accident investigations to increase awareness about the issues and promote recommended safety solutions.

For more information visit [www.nts.gov/mostwanted](http://www.nts.gov/mostwanted) or contact [SafetyAdvocacy@ntsb.gov](mailto:SafetyAdvocacy@ntsb.gov)

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation—railroad, highway, marine, and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the federal government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.

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